

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: August 14, 1961

SUBJECT: Berlin

PARTICIPANTS:

Ambassador Fencaltea - Italian Embassy

Mr. Foy D. Kohler - EUR

Mr. August Vellettri - WE

AUG 23 1961

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EUR - (2)  
WE - Mr. Blue  
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Ambassador Fencaltea, who called at his request, said that he was interested in learning our reaction to the Soviet decision to seal-off the borders between East and West Berlin so that he could inform his Government. In reply, Mr. Kohler stated that the Allied Commandants in West Berlin would protest the action and that probably a separate note of protest would be addressed to Moscow. In this connection, the French had submitted a text which was being considered by the other members of the Working Group. Apart from these protests, continued Mr. Kohler, the Working Group, which had been meeting all day to discuss this latest development in Berlin, had a difficult time to come up with suggestions of other countermeasures in view of the fact that the Soviet action was intended primarily to limit the freedom of movement of people under their control. These measures highlighted the utter failure of the Communist regime and should be exploited for the benefit of the uncommitted nations but from the point of view of Western interests, it should be noted that the Russians had been very careful in specifying that blocking the East Germans from moving into West Berlin did not affect allied traffic. Mr. Kohler agreed with Ambassador Fencaltea that the Russians had violated the 1949 Four Power Agreement, but pointed out that the closing of the border between East and West Berlin could not be considered a provocation of war. In reply to a question, Mr. Kohler said that among the countermeasures discussed by the Working Group was the possibility of refusing TTD's (Temporary Travel Documents) to East Germans and prohibiting some Western firms from participating in the Leipzig Fair. These measures, however, would be of slight consequence and would not have the desired effect. Economic sanctions had been proposed, especially by the Germans who had reacted somewhat emotionally to the problem, but the U.S. felt that such extreme measures should be adopted only when the Russians tried to interfere with Allied rights.

In reply

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In reply to a further question, Mr. Kohler said that we were not considering taking this particular Soviet action to the UN since it would be impossible to isolate one aspect of the whole Berlin problem. The Soviet action had been discussed by the NATO Permanent Representatives who according to our information, had voiced agreement on the suspension of TTD's as a retaliatory measure.

Ambassador Fencaltea referred to the existing tension in Berlin and inquired whether we saw any danger of a popular uprising in East Germany. The Ambassador further inquired whether the West might be induced by West Germany to come to the aid of the East Germans through armed intervention. Mr. Kohler minimized the possibility of such an uprising but recalled the U.S. had already decided on two occasions (once in 1953 during the East German uprising and the second time in 1956 during the Hungarian revolution) not to resort to armed intervention because such a move would be construed by the Soviet as a direct challenge to them. As for the West Germans, they would have no other choice than to allow events to take their course without intervention. While we could not be a party to the Soviet decision to isolate East Berlin from the West the Soviet action, analyzed objectively and impassionately, might very well serve Western interests since it had been our concern that the increasing number of refugees into West Germany might depopulate East Germany.

Invited to comment on Secretary Rusk's trip to Europe, Mr. Kohler said that the trip had been a success. The NATO Allies had agreed on the need to negotiate with the Russians from a position of firmness. It was his impression, Mr. Kohler said, that despite his blustering and threatening posture, Khrushchev had not succeeded in scaring the Europeans. The Ambassador inquired whether Mr. Kohler noted any differences in the European approach to the Berlin problem. Mr. Kohler replied that the French were inclined to temporize and wait for further developments while the U.S. had indicated its readiness to open talks with the Russians at the earliest opportunity. As for the other Allies, the UK and Belgium Governments might have some difficulty with domestic public opinion in the event the West should pursue a too rigid position. As far as Italy was concerned, Mr. Kohler said that he had been encouraged by Alessandrini's statement to the NATO Council.

The Ambassador then asked whether the U.S. was considering offering the Russians any counterproposals for a negotiated settlement of the Berlin issue. Mr. Kohler replied that the U.S. stood by the initial proposal made in 1959. It was our position that consideration of fallback positions at this time would be inadvisable because of the risk that they might be leaked to the Russians. Alternative proposals should be seriously considered only at the time when negotiations are actually taking place as to not show our hand to the Russians. Nevertheless, continued Mr. Kohler, the West would not be a party to legalizing the status of East Germany. This would mean carving a new state out of Germany, and neither the U.S. nor NATO would agree to this.

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